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## Making friends with the monsters under my bed. Part 1

OC OC

Lots of world building here. I think I might actually play in this universe a little. If you want to play in this sandbox yourself then by all means, have fun.

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The council chambers were in an uproar.

So much had happened in a very short amount of time that the council, which had governed the galaxy for nearly 8,000 years, was still trying to regain its bearing. The bureaucracy, often complained about by the galactic citizenry was laboriously slow in reacting to anything. A common joke was that if you wanted to enact a change to a law, you had best prepare your next three generations for politics. The introduction of a new representative or the changing of one was the bureaucratic equivalent of a snap decision.

Some of the representatives looked angrily to the speaker's box, the source of the galactic upheaval. To the representative of what many were calling "the Interlopers".

They were extra-galactic refugees from the Andromeda galaxy, a shock in itself as they were the first life proven to come from another galaxy. But that shock was replaced quickly with fear when they described WHY they were refugees.

A millennium ago, they had their own galactic community and were touching on technology aimed at exploring the neighboring galaxies. It seemed the spirit of exploration had not diminished in their councils 20,000 years of existence or perhaps they were looking to expand due to over population, or even for conquest. None of the refugees could remember and it mattered little now. Their earliest sensor sweeps into the nearby galaxies were noticed by something truly terrifying.

What they called "The Scourge".

A biological nightmare species bent on consuming everything in the universe. They had found the sensor signal and followed it to the source looking for new prey. Once they had arrived, they began to systematically devour every consumable material they were interested in before moving on to the next system. Slowly growing in both speed and strength as their numbers were swelled by the consumed mass. The only weakness appeared to be their lack of FTL.

Or, at least, traditional FTL. The Scourge had the ability to 'sense' weak points in the Oort clouds of systems and establish momentary wormholes between systems through the fabric of space-time using bio-drives. This was the stuff of fiction for the

galaxy and had only been theorized by the Interlopers by the time of the Scourges arrival in their own galaxy. It wasn't until their galaxy had been half-devoured that they cracked the secret to "hyper-lane" travel synthetically. Until then, like us, they had used a warp style FTL. Great for transiting systems quickly but it could take weeks to move from one system to another. Hyper-lane travel was near instantaneous, but it took ages to cross the system to get to the next hyper-lane jump point. Thus, it took them nearly 1,000 years to consume the Andromeda galaxy.

The varied species that made up the science committee practically vibrated with excitement and could be seen physically holding themselves back from running to their labs to try and combine hyper-lane and warp technology together. Members of the trade guilds could be seen making their way over to them, clearly the laboratories would be receiving fresh private funding. The war mongering Thrax were hissing among themselves, clearly discussing the concept of disrupting FTL as a war strategy. But most of the council was focused on the story rather than the scientific possibilities.

The Interlopers were the last remnants of their galaxy, a melting pot of all the varied species yet to be devoured and had found an intergalactic hyper-lane connecting their galaxy to this one. In a last-ditch effort, a colony ship of truly galactic proportions was constructed and the last of the galaxy's warships stayed behind to slow down the Scourge. After the refugee ship transited to our galaxy the fleet was to detonate a nova bomb to disrupt the intergalactic hyper-lane node.

Layiria sat in her seat among the explorer's guild members and briefly lamented the destruction of a route to a new galaxy but recovered quickly when she remembered that there was a galaxy eating species on the other side. To her left she could hear a Fernic brood-mother discussing the necessity of arming their exploration vessels with the guild master.

"Noble members of this galactic council." Spoke the representative of the Interlopers. "We will gladly share our knowledge with you, but the threat of the Scourge must be addressed."

"Why?" asked the Rondorian representative as he preened his mane, "You ran and closed the door behind you. The threat is contained."

'Damn pretentious felines' thought Layiria, 'if anything didn't pander to them and call them pretty, they didn't care about it'. The Rondorians had caused more than a few bills to be bogged down in committee just because it didn't involve them in some way.

"You forget, the scourge came from outside our own galaxy." The Interloper continued. "We closed one door, yes. But how many others exist?"

The Rondorian representative had no answer to that.

"How long do you estimate until they could find another route?" asked the Head Chair of the Quorum. Another shock. The members of the Quorum usually only spoke to open and close council meetings and to officially declare new laws. They rarely

took part in the discussion.

"It is impossible to know for certain. We cannot be sure how many neighboring galaxies they may inhabit. We cannot even be sure that there isn't another hyper-lane connecting our galaxy to this one."

"Head chair." Came the monotone from the Monotarian collective. Eyes turned to the cybernetic 'representative'. Representative being only the most convenient word to use here as the Monotari were a collective consciousness of machines that had evolved a personality, if you spoke to one, you spoke to them all. Eerie to talk to but there was a reason they had a permanent position on the science committee. "Based on the average number of systems per galaxy, factoring in the estimated speed of traversing a system, and accounting for random hazards in..."

"The bottom line please." Commanded the Head Chair. The Monotari could go on forever just explaining the math used to reach an answer.

"Anywhere from less than a century to little more than two. We are assuming that the last passage away from the andromeda galaxy was tracked of course as simple random probability could halve that time or quintuple it. Chaos based mathematics are annoyingly imprecise. We can have a better estimate ready once we fully understand the mathematics of hyper-lane travel and can study any other intergalactic nodes."

The council chamber felt just a bit colder then and some members shivered visibly. 50 to 1,000 years. Not nearly the kind of precision one expected from the Monotari but with just the observations made by the Interlopers as they were fleeing the Scourge, little more could be expected. Layiria figured that the Explorer's guild would be very busy very soon, equipped with new scanners and sent to the rim systems to scan for these intergalactic nodes.

The seven members of the council Quorum spoke amongst themselves and for just a moment, Layiria felt a flicker of hope. It had been over a century since the Quorum had made an emergency decree. Impending galactic destruction certainly qualified as reason to do so.

"Honored members of the galactic council." Began the Head Chair of the Quorum. "This 'Scourge' is a clear and present threat. Not only here but to the entire universe, to life itself. We call for an emergency vote here and now to take action to end the threat. We call for a vote to create a war council."

Gasps could be heard from every species. Not in recent memory had the council taken a 'total war' footing. The last war council had been formed to exterminate the Scyllia nearly 300 years ago. Layiria had expected a defensive posture to guard this galaxy, but someone down there was obviously thinking ahead and didn't want the milky way to be the last bastion, beset on all sides by the Scourge only to eventually fall as nothing could last forever. Some of the lazier representatives would have latched on to the

most optimistic estimate and claimed that it was a problem for future generations. But some, like Layiria's own people, would look at the 50-year guess as the ultimate deadline.

But an emergency vote had been called and so the representatives, without even the chance to confer with their home systems leadership, cast their vote immediately.

The motion had passed 47 to 34. The galaxy had declared war on the Scourge.

"Motion is so passed. Individual nations and groups are further permitted to offer up species close to the great barrier for consideration for uplifting, we will need all the help we can get." More surprise. Adding a spacefaring race was a huge undertaking. Translating language into galactic common alone took a year or more and teaching common to the new species could be a generational undertaking. Uplifting a species added millennia of scientific progress and culture in so short a time that culture shock had driven some species to suicide.

Now came the formation of the war council. Second now in power only to the Quorum. Certain nations and groups were assured a position by default and others could contribute or petition to join later. The assault forces would be made of the larger, stronger or warlike species, like the Rondorians and the Thrax. The science Committee would dedicate entire research stations to R&D. The trade guild would handle logistics. And for reconnaissance...

"Layiria." Spoke the guild master. "You will be the liaison for us in the war council."

She could not find a good reason to argue. Her species, the Bullera, were famous for their natural inquisitiveness bordering on paranoia. It was why so many joined the Explorer's guild, they NEEDED to know what was out there. Layiria expected that when the news of the council meeting became public, half of her species would clamor to join so they could find the threat before it could find them.

"Guild master, with the level of this threat, should I mention... them?"

Layiria was pinned by the three-eyed stare of her superior.

"Which 'them'?"

"The quarantined system."

The guild master thought hard for a moment.

"I will discuss it privately with the Head Chair. That species is a heavily guarded council secret. Mention nothing until I return with an answer." He quickly turned and disappeared into the crowd. He was not in the habit of wasting time, he would have an answer

before the end of the local day.

'Heavily guarded secret indeed' thought Layiria. The existence of the system was only known to the Quorum and the higher echelons of the Explorer's guild and their sister guild, the Cartographers. All who knew were sworn to secrecy. This was to ensure that flight paths were charted AROUND the system to keep it secret. Layiria only knew of them because she had done a rotation at the black site in place there to subtly scan their data net and eliminate any technology that could lead to FTL development. The species that lived there were too dangerous to allow into the larger galaxy.

During the Scyllian 'crusade of purification', three systems were found to have thwarted the invasion attempts of the xenophobic Scyllia. All class IV Death-worlds with native flora and fauna so aggressive that even the Scyllia could gain nothing from them. So they left the undeveloped worlds and moved on.

At least that's what the public records showed. There was another world that thwarted the Scyllia. The only Death-world that ever earned the class V rating, not that the rating was known to the wider galaxy. To the layman there were Class IV death worlds and then there were inhospitable rocks floating through space. The hidden requirement for class V was sentience. And the dominant species of the system were more than just sentient, even some of the lesser species displayed obvious intelligence and problem-solving capabilities. Thrice during her tenure at the black site, she had to purge the species' data net of FTL capable technologies. The clever creatures were so close so often that it was truly only a matter of time until someone slipped, and the galaxy was subject to death-worlders.

However, with the looming threat of galactic annihilation, perhaps it was prudent to fight monsters with monsters. Her observations of the species led her to believe that rather than forcing them to help, perhaps a confirmed threat would make them repeat that most wondrous phenomena of putting aside their differences and banding together for a common cause.

They were truly fascinating, that species which lived on the third planet of the Sol system.

The Humans.